

## E-Series Wednesday

**1** Now the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some sly way to arrest Jesus and kill him. **2** "But not during the Feast," they said, "or the people may riot." **3** While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. **4** Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? **5** It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. **6** "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. **7** The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. **8** She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. **9** I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." **10** Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Jesus to them. **11** They were delighted to hear this and promised to give him money. So he watched for an opportunity to hand him over. —**Mark 14:1-11**

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Every day this week, I will be sharing with you some reflections written by my friends James Howell, pastor of Myers Park UMC in Charlotte. He will guide us through this Holy Week.

Judas: his name was the #1 most common name in first century Palestine – and perhaps there is a hint in the commonness of his name that there also is a commonness about his betrayal. Yes, he was the one who betrayed – but was there really only one? Weren't all the disciples bumbling (just as we are), thick in the skull, Judas being simply the one who most blatantly acted out the incomprehension and failure they all shared?

On Wednesday of the original Holy Week, Jesus and Judas find themselves at dinner when a woman cracks open a pottery flask containing rare, expensive ointment (worth a full year's salary!) and pours it on Jesus. Judas is appalled. But to her the cost is nothing: she loves Jesus, extravagantly, not measuring or calculating.

What is the meaning of this oil? In ancient times, instead of embalming or cremating, bodies were washed and prepared for burial with oil lotions. He isn't dead yet, but in anticipation she lavishes the finest burial treatment on Jesus. He would die late Friday afternoon, and in the rush to bury him before the dusk beginning the Sabbath, there would be no time.

She alone seems to understand that Jesus is about to die. Did God bless her with foreknowledge? Or was she simply paying better attention, with a deeper, more intuitive sense that Jesus was not a violent revolutionary but a Savior about to pour out the very heart of God? Her "beautiful" act is the gold standard for us who more often slide by on the cheap instead of expending boldly in the life of faith.

Instead of loving as she did, Judas recoils against a Jesus he could not comprehend. He "betrayed": the Greek word *paradidomi* means to "hand over." In [Exploring Christianity](#), I wrote that "*In the first half of each Gospel, Jesus is in command, boldly striding into new territories, conquering demons, healing diseases; he is a doer, in control of everything, even the wind and the sea. But then the mood changes abruptly. Jesus becomes reflective, darkly hinting at his fate. He ominously walks straight into danger. He is 'handed over' by Judas, to the authorities, and he does not fight back; he says nothing. He is no longer active, but passive. In a sense, this is hopeful for us, for our lives often traverse that same ground, as we grow old or sick and are increasingly forced to be dependent on others. We fear our identity is lost if we are not active, productive. But Jesus shows us that who we are, who he was, is found not in our activity but in what we suffer, in what we receive.*"

Henri Nouwen gave a wonderfully insightful lecture on this, called "The Spirituality of Waiting," which you can read [online](#), or hear via a [recording](#) of Nouwen himself!

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*Pastor Michael*